

New Testament Baptism
by Hendrik Joubert

The subject of water baptism has been thoroughly debated by novices and scholars alike. A respected Greek scholar at my alma mater made a point of telling all new students that if they decided to study New Testament Greek in order to prove doctrinal points, they would be sorely disappointed. He explained that if you cannot prove it from the Afrikaans, English or other respectable translation, you will not be able to prove it from the Greek. Although the usefulness of word studies should not be dismissed, this generation is able to check seemingly ambiguous statements by simply comparing translations.

I know that we do not need a fancy education, not because of what this Professor said, but because of what God said through Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians – For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 – as well as to the Ephesians: ...by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ... Ephesians 3:3-4

We live in an age where personal rights, choices and desires are demanded – ironically to the exclusion of the rights of others – however the idea that one may subject God's words to personal desires and interpretations dates back to the first age. More recently Calvin said of baptism that it matters not whether water is poured over you, or whether you are sprinkled or immersed. He argued that each society should have the freedom to adapt to the environment. He then admits that baptism in the New Testament was exclusively by immersion.

This idea that man has the right to change and adapt the teaching of Christ (2 John 9) to suit their "needs" is clearly condemned by God. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN. Matthew 15:9. This principle dates further back than the prophet Isaiah. Changing what God says is not only a demonstration of a lack of faith, but also a lack of respect, or reverence. (Numbers 20:12)

When I read the Scriptures I learn that, just as there is one Lord, and one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:5-6), there can only be one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) which every believer (Mark 16:16) has to undergo in order to make his or her appeal to God for a clear conscience. (1 Peter 3:21)

Through the apostle Paul the Lord teaches us that one is baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), to be where you will be eligible for every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 1:3) He explains that as you are immersed in water, you are buried with Christ, baptized into His death, to be raised from that watery grave to start a new life, born again by water and the Spirit. (Romans 6:3-4; John 3:3-5).

Yes, it is only the blood of Jesus that can remove sin. (Hebrews 9:13-14) Baptism saves as it is the way God determined for me to call upon the name of the Lord – make an appeal to God for a clear conscience. (1 Peter 3:21 – NASV, RSV, TLB, ESV, Darby Translation, and others.). In Acts 22:16 we find an illustration of this when Ananias seems surprised at Paul's delay to make this appeal: Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. Failing to make the appeal in the way God instructed, leaves me in my sin.

It is when my body is washed with pure water, that my conscience is cleansed by the blood of Christ. (Hebrews 10:22). It is again through the apostle Paul that the Lord explains that sinners are washed, they are sanctified, justified – cleansed from their sins when they submit by faith to His instruction in this regard. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

The purpose of baptism, the reason why I submit to it, is of the utmost importance. Those who submitted to an immersion in water, but who were not buried with Christ in order to make their appeal to God for a clear conscience, to be raised to start a new life, had to be baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:1-5) The thief on the cross could not be buried with Christ.

When a sinner is immersed in water, it is to request the blood of Christ in the way God has determined for him or her to do so, and is therefore baptized for the remission of sins. It does not matter how many times I have submitted to the vain baptisms of men, I will always retain the privilege to make my appeal to God in the way He has instructed us through His word, so I may be added to the one body – church – of His Son. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; Acts 2:47; 19:1-5)